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Council Report

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

Sacramento
March 1958

Honorable Hugh M. Burns, President Pro Tem of the Senate
and
Honorable Luther H. Lincoln, Speaker of the Assembly

Pursuant to Division 5, Part 1, Chapter 2, Article 1.3 Section 3211 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, the Coordinating Council on State Programs for the Blind herewith submits to the Legislature its sixth annual report covering the period from July 1, 1956 to June 30, 1957.

We believe the work of the Council has furthered the principle contained in the statute creating the Council; namely, provide for the coordination of the functions and programs of the various state departments insofar as such functions and programs affect the blind.

We trust this report will be of assistance to the Legislature.

Respectfully submitted,

COORDINATING COUNCIL ON STATE
PROGRAMS FOR THE BLIND

Malcolm H. Merrill, M.D., Director
State Department of Public Health

Roy E. Simpson, Director
State Department of Education

George K. Wyman, Director
State Department of Social Welfare

MEMBERSHIP, ORGANIZATION, AND FUNCTIONS OF THE COUNCIL

At the beginning of the twelve-month period covered by this report (July 1, 1956 - June 30, 1957), the Council members were:

Malcolm H. Merrill, M.D., Director, State Department of
Public Health

Roy E. Simpson, Director, State Department of Education

George K. Wyman, Director, State Department of Social Welfare.

The organization and functions of the Council were the same as during previous years, with the Coordinating Committee on State Services for the Blind serving as a working committee and reporting to the Council at its quarterly meetings.

CURRENT STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM OF BLINDNESS

The problem of blindness has many aspects which are of tremendous consequence to the elective bodies which seek to serve the best interests of all people in California. There are an estimated 26,000 blind persons in California of which about 1,300 are children. Concerning the numbers of individuals with this handicap, two factors should be noted:

1. Between 1942 and 1955, 685 newborn California babies were added to the rolls of the blind. All were in excess of the amount of infant blindness which would have been normal for that period. This epidemic of blindness followed upon technological advances in delivering oxygen into the incubators of premature infants and was observed in many places in the world. Intensive, long, and costly investigation was undertaken before the discovery that these oxygen systems had become too efficient for the developing vision of premature babies and too much oxygen was blinding them. Urgent and widespread action to apply this information accomplished a reduction from a peak of about 135 cases a year in 1951, 1952, and 1953 to dramatically reduced numbers in the following years. No cases have been reported for 1957.

2. A second important factor is the aging of our population which means that adult blindness is an increasing problem as greater numbers of individuals live to an age when the risk becomes greater of developing conditions leading to blindness. After the age of 65 almost two in every hundred are blind as against the average for all ages of about two in every thousand.

The impact of these two facts is quickly seen:

1. It is estimated to cost about \$2,000 more per student, per school year, to educate a blind child compared with a sighted child. The cost of educating just those 685 blind children through elementary and secondary levels commits the state to an expenditure of an estimated \$17 millions in excess of what those costs would have been for students without their handicap.

2. Half of all blind adults are receiving aid to the blind, currently about 13,000, at an annual cost in direct payments of more than \$14 millions.

Both of the expenditures above ignore the costs of special services, vocational training and rehabilitation, administrative costs, loss of productivity and taxes, as well as the inestimable human costs.

Two needs arise from this problem:

1. Ever increasing emphasis on the research and application of knowledge toward preventing blindness.
2. Fulfillment of a responsibility to provide services for handicapped individuals.

REVIEW OF DEPARTMENTAL PROGRAMS

California ranks high among the states in its provision of a tremendous range of sound state programs for the blind:

I. Social Welfare Programs for the Blind

A. California's three social welfare programs for the blind may be briefly summarized as follows:

1. AID TO NEEDY BLIND in the form of financial assistance paid by the county, state, and federal government to those blind persons in need who can not support themselves because of loss or impairment of sight. Employment opportunities for most of these recipients are few because of the age factor alone. Actually, most of these persons have been self-supporting and blindness has occurred at an age when retirement had already begun. During the year 1956-1957 an average of 12,963 persons received such assistance, the average grant for June, 1957, being \$91.74. In addition to financial aid, many of these persons received other services from their county welfare departments to promote a happier and fuller life. This program is administered by the county welfare departments and supervised by the State Department of Social Welfare.
2. AID TO PARTIALLY SELF-SUPPORTING BLIND RESIDENTS in the form of financial assistance paid by the county and state to persons, who, because of blindness, are unable fully to provide themselves with the necessities of life, but who are working on a plan for self-support. During the year an average of 354 persons received such assistance. The average amount of the grant for June, 1957, being \$94.90. This program is also administered by the county welfare departments and supervised by this department.
3. PREVENTION OF BLINDNESS PROGRAM to restore vision by providing medical treatment or surgery, or to prevent further loss of vision. This service is available to both applicants for and recipients of Aid to the Blind. It may be obtained by persons in needy circumstances whose eye condition can be helped through eye surgery. During the fiscal year 1956-1957, 755 persons were selected by the State Ophthalmologist as potential

patients under this program from a review of 9,012 eye examination reports processed in determining degree of blindness. A total of 238 eye surgeries were performed during the year. This program is administered directly by the State Department of Social Welfare and has the enthusiastic cooperation and invaluable assistance of the staffs of the county welfare departments.

B. Decreasing Dependency:

Sound social welfare programs for the blind must be so administered as to appreciably contribute to the reduction of dependency in its many forms. Rehabilitation in its true sense is the restoration of the individual to the fullest measure of health, usefulness, and satisfaction. It is the responsibility of all concerned with the administration of aid to the blind to assist applicants and recipients to decrease or eliminate dependency. Increasingly effective efforts are being made to reduce economic dependency, particularly among the younger blind, to the benefit of both the individual and the taxpayer. Steps toward this end include: 1) the establishment of specialized caseloads in aid to the blind in the larger counties so that specific and focussed attention can be given clients in considering a plan for self-support and self-care; as of June, 1957, aid to the blind had been placed on a specialized basis in 28 counties which includes 91 per cent of the state caseload. 2) A regular schedule of conferences between state and county staffs which stress rehabilitation and practical means for achieving self-support; in addition special consultation on a case-by-case basis is available to assist county staffs in helping clients to make plans for self-support. 3) A referral plan to other specialized state services for blind persons who have the potential for becoming self-supporting or who can be helped to achieve greater self-care. During the past year a total of 451 referrals were made by the State Department of Social Welfare to Field Services for the Adult Blind in the State Department of Education. That agency, after a home call and careful evaluation, in turn, referred 47 persons to the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation and 21 persons to the State Orientation Center for the Blind. Field Services for the Adult Blind acquainted all of the persons contacted with the rich resources available to meet various needs of blind persons.

C. Other Program Aspects:

1. The Assembly Interim Committee on Social Welfare released the report of its thoughtful study on welfare programs for the blind. The problems pointed up by this study are:
 - a. the need for policies and administrative action which will result in a larger number of Aid to Needy Blind recipients making plans to move on to the partially self-supporting blind residents program.
 - b. the need for smaller caseloads in Aid to the Blind so that greater effort can be focused on helping blind persons achieve self-support.

While this report was released toward the close of the year, steps were immediately initiated to carry out the recommendations of the committee.

2. Legislation:

There was one statute enacted by the 1957 session of the Legislature which became operative in February, a bill which increased from \$3,500 to \$5,000 the amount of real property which a recipient may have. This measure afforded relief to those recipients who owned their own homes and have experienced sharp increases in assessed valuation during the past several years.

3. Determining Degree of Blindness:

During the year 1956-1957 a total of 9,012 eye examination reports were processed by the Division for the Blind to determine whether the applicants and recipients were eligible as to degree of blindness. Some 4,974 of these reports were for applicants, of which 54.2 per cent were found eligible as to degree of blindness, 36.6 per cent ineligible, and 9.2 per cent were pending.

4. Achieving Self-Support:

During the year a total of 136 recipients of Aid to Partially Self-Supporting Blind residents were discontinued for all causes. Of this total number 59, or 43.4 per cent, were discontinued because of earnings. Since the statewide average APSB caseload during the year was 354 cases, this means that 16.6 per cent of these were discontinued because of earnings. Some of these blind persons will have their aid restored while others have achieved full and permanent self-support.

5. Aid to Blind Manual:

Work was completed on the recodification of the Aid to the Blind Manual of Policies and Procedures and the new manual was issued in November. Work continued on the gradual expansion of portions of the handbook sections, especially with material which county staffs feel is needed.

6. Consolidation of Offices:

Early in the year most of the functions in connection with the Division for the Blind's two direct operating programs - Prevention of Blindness and Determination of Degree of Blindness - were transferred from Los Angeles to the central office in Sacramento. As a result of this consolidation, marked economies were effected.

II. Education Programs for the Blind

A. Services for Blind Preschool Children and Their Parents in Southern California:

On December 31, 1957, five visiting teachers served blind preschool children and their parents in Southern California. (The Variety Club Blind Babies Foundation in San Francisco, a private agency, renders similar services in Central and Northern California). Three teachers were located in Los Angeles, and one each in Santa Barbara and San Diego. A total of 204 blind preschool children were on the list as receiving services on December 31, 1957. The dramatic decline of blindness as caused by too much oxygen is a most encouraging fact which justifies the hope that in a few years we will have only one-quarter of the present number of blind preschool children. The need for services will diminish first for blind children of preschool age and then for blind children of school age as successive age groups join the school age population.

B. Education of Blind Children of School Age

Resident facility

The California School for the Blind continued to provide education for blind, partially blind, and deaf-blind children from kindergarten through high school as a part of the public school system of the state. It functions under the Division of Special Schools and Services of the State Department of Education. It is the aim of the school to help blind children to gain a knowledge of the realities, and to give them the feeling that they are recognized as individuals in their own right. It is the policy of the school to have all tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students attend public high schools in Berkeley or Oakland while they receive reader's service, guidance, tutoring, and room and board at the California School for the Blind. This arrangement enables the students to adjust to studying and competing with their seeing peers.

The school year opened with an enrollment of 155. During the school year 1956-1957, 55 students were released: 6 graduated, 36 went to public school facilities in their home communities, and 13 left the school for other reasons such as moving out of state, lack of progress, referral to other services. This is an unusually large turnover (more than a third of the total enrollment), the main reason for which is the increasing number of referrals to public school classes. The school year 1956-1957 began with 128 pupils remaining from the previous school year, the school year 1957-1958 started with a carry-over of only 112 students.

Public School Programs

For the 1956-1957 school year, 45 resource rooms or classes with 46 $\frac{1}{2}$ teachers provided educational facilities for 336 blind children; and 49 resource rooms or classes plus 7 itinerant programs with 58 teachers provided educational facilities for 730 partially-seeing children. Programs have been established in 21 communities for blind children and in 22 communities for partially-seeing children.

Recent federal legislation made it mandatory for the chief state school officer of each state to register all legally blind children enrolled in public school programs from kindergarten through the twelfth grade on the first Monday in January. On January 7, 1957 there were 615 such blind children registered in California, not counting the children enrolled at the California School for the Blind.

Additional services through two counselors working from the Bureau of Special Education will be available for severely visually handicapped students in areas where programs have not been established. A senior clerk serving as registrar of visually handicapped children is processing American Printing House for the Blind orders for public schools and will assist in locating and circulating brailled and recorded materials.

The state series of text books is being provided in large type for partially seeing students for grades 3 through 8, and contracts are being written by the Bureau of Textbooks and Publications with the American Printing House for the Blind for the production of the state series of textbooks in braille. The volunteer transcribers of brailled and recorded materials have met several times this year in an effort to better understand the needs of visually handicapped students and to become organized at the state level.

C. Readers' Service for Blind College Students:

During the fiscal year 1956-1957, 90 students used the Readers' Service for College Students. The average amount expended per student for reader's service was \$410.07. The 90 students were enrolled in 31 universities or colleges in the state of California.

D. Field Services for the Adult Blind

This program is conceived as providing service in terms of 1) counseling to help the individual, newly blinded, to mobilize his capabilities, and solve his own problems on his own terms, 2) adjustment to family, community, and self in order that development of basic skills of living may proceed, and, 3) orientation, including actual teaching of skills which will give the blind client freedom in daily living and aid him to aim toward self-support.

During 1956-1957 the field workers made more than 14,656 home visits to an average of 1300 blind clients each month giving over 12,000 lessons in Braille, typing, orientation, household arts and crafts. Field workers held 6,031 counseling sessions with the blind client, his family, or both, cooperating with many other individuals and agencies in order to help the client achieve the goals of better adjustment. Over 871 referrals were made to other agencies for additional help.

Opportunity work centers for the blind have been established in Visalia and San Bernardino and have joined in operation the one in San Jose.

E. Intensive Orientation and Pre-vocational Training

A program of intensive orientation for blind adults was once generally regarded as experimental. The program of the Oakland Orientation Center for the Blind, operating as part of the state public education system, is now beyond the experimental stage. It is being demonstrated on a continuing basis that blind individuals who represent all sections of society are capable, with proper orientation and guidance, of living full and active lives and participating in community activities.

During 1956-1957, 45 students were enrolled. Of the 36 students whose orientation program was terminated, 6 are taking further training at the school, 3 are self employed, and 12 are employed by others; 5 are housewives; 5 are unemployed; the employment status of 4 is unknown; and 1 is deceased.

F. Vocational Rehabilitation of the Blind

The budget for the current fiscal year for the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation provided for the addition of the equivalent of two Counselors for the Blind which were added to the fifteen full-time equivalent positions. One full-time position was filled in Los Angeles where the load of blind applicants has been heaviest and two half-time positions have been assigned to the San Diego and San Jose Districts. Coverage of all of the districts has been rounded out with specialized Counselors for the Blind.

At the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 1957, there were a total of 476 legally blind cases in the active rolls. During the year 248 cases were added to the load and 192 cases left the load by closure. Of the closed cases 97 were persons who had received substantial service and were placed in employment; 22 cases left the load after receiving substantial service but were unemployed due to health conditions, withdrawal from the labor market, etc; 73 cases left the load before a rehabilitation plan could be initiated for other reasons, including lack of interest, aggravated disability, and the like.

The Vending Stand Program of the Bureau continues to be the largest in the country with 174 locations at close of the fiscal year. The operators grossed in sales approximately \$3,605,907.00 which gave them an average net rate of \$342 per month; 174 operators employed a total of 74 full- and part-time blind employees.

During the year the Bureau's State Supervisor of Services for the Blind has been given responsibility of concentrating on inservice training of Counselors for the Blind and considerable progress has been shown. A special report on employer contacts is being required by Counselors for the Blind which has aided in developing new job opportunities.

The Bureau is currently tabulating a special statistical study of the entire blind caseload which will provide some valuable information on the nature and characteristics of rehabilitable blind in California.

Communication and coordination with other agencies for the blind has progressed, but additional opportunities need to be developed in order to explore mutual problems and develop even more effective cooperative relationships among agencies serving the adult blind.

G. State Library Books for the Blind

During the fiscal year 1956-1957, there was an increase of approximately three per cent in circulation of Braille and Moon type books and Talking Book records. A total of 11,605 volumes in Braille and Moon and a total of 78,854 containers of Talking Book records were circulated making a grand total of 90,459 volumes and containers. Circulation of embossed type books continues to decrease but at a slightly lower rate this year while circulation of Talking Books continues to increase.

At the end of the fiscal year there were 2,773 active borrowers, a decrease of 30 since the end of last fiscal year. This drop is due to shortage of Talking Book machines. During this fiscal year, we received only 273 new machines because of production difficulties experienced in manufacture of the new model. Ordinarily we receive 75 new machines a month. This lack of machines has resulted in a long waiting list.

There are 4,386 Talking Book machines in homes of blind readers. More and more borrowers are using their own phonographs to play Talking Books.

H. California Industries for the Blind

The fiscal year 1956-1957 brought an increase in sales to the three Workshop Centers for the Blind operated by the Department of Education. Sales totalled \$2,504,000 for the year. It is interesting to note the increase in these operations in the last twenty years when the sales volume for 1936-1937 was \$105,750. The sales to the Federal government totalled \$1,503,487 or 60 per cent of the total sales for the 1956-1957 year.

The Coordinating Council in its report to the Legislature for the fiscal year 1955-1956 suggested that the operations in the Centers be limited to 1) the production of goods which can be sold to the federal, state, county, and city political subdivisions and districts; 2) the production of carefully selected items that can be sold competitively with private industry; and 3) subcontract or assembly operations. These are worthwhile objectives and the policy of the Department of Education during the latter part of 1956-1957 and continuing into the current fiscal year has been to increase insofar as possible the subcontract operations, particularly in the Los Angeles area. Sales to franchise distributors continue to represent approximately 24 per cent of the total sales volume; plans are not yet fully developed to offset this type of sale with items competitive with private industry.

The wages paid to the blind and handicapped during the 1956-1957 fiscal year totalled \$537,118.00, the second highest wage payment in the history of the operations of the three centers. The department has continued to improve the pay rates for the workers wherever possible and it will be noted that the workers received 21.4¢ of each dollar of sales during the 1956-1957 fiscal year.

III. Prevention of Blindness--a Public Health Program

Prevention of the blindness of small prematurely born babies which was due to too much oxygen is a particularly striking example of the results of research, quick dissemination, and prompt application of new knowledge. Other conspicuous examples of public health methods employed to reduce blindness might be cited. In 1915 legislation was first passed in California requiring the use of a preventive drug in the eyes of all newborn babies to prevent blindness due to infections at the time of birth. In the decade prior to the common use of this procedure, gonorrhea was an important cause of blindness. Many elderly adults blinded by this cause as infants are still drawing monthly welfare aid. But after preventive measures against such birth infections were discovered and acceptance of the procedures fought for, gonorrhea as a cause of blindness has practically disappeared. As a matter of fact a recent survey of the causes of blindness among children revealed that the last recorded child blind of this cause was born in 1945.

The same picture of prevention at work is seen in the case of blindness due to syphilis. Once important, syphilis has all but disappeared as a cause of babies being born blind. This progress dates from the 1939 regulations requiring all expectant mothers to have a blood test for syphilis and the advances in antibiotic treatment.

Development of the Prevention of Blindness Project in the State Department of Public Health, under a grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, reflects the conviction that there are other blinding conditions of both children and adults to which such preventive measures can be applied. For example, the department's demonstration

project has emphasized control of glaucoma because it is the chief cause of irreversible adult blindness. The cause of glaucoma is unknown and requires further investigation, but even without specific knowledge of its cause, much of blindness due to glaucoma can be prevented. The key to this is early detection and continuing medical supervision.

Among children the earliest possible discovery of a type of one-eyed blindness and its treatment can return to full capacity numbers of young adults. During World War II, in both selective service and industry, rejections for vision defects outranked other causes for rejection. In this instance as in the preceding one, education and mass detection methods favor early casefinding. Public health departments, both state and local, have knowledge of measures which would prevent more blindness and would, as has been cited previously, save the sight of thousands as well as tens of millions of dollars. The time has come for strongly supported, aggressive, organized public health efforts to prevent more blindness.

PLANNING FOR FUTURE NEEDS

In addition to mobilizing our resources to meet the challenge of blindness prevention, there is a continuing responsibility to shape our education and welfare programs for the blind to more effectively meet the needs of this handicapped group, especially in the areas of self-care and self-support. The Coordinating Council through its committee has devoted substantial attention to a current review and evaluation of state services for the blind and consideration of this study by the Interim Committee on Social Welfare is expected during this session.